

EPISODE 2x02 "NUDUSHEN"

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Selected text culled from the "SERENITY" Movie Shooting Script by Joss Whedon

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Teaser

INT. SOME FANCY HOTEL-TYPE PLACE

Two grand doors swing open. MAL, ZOE, JAYNE, SIMON and KAYLEE, all well dressed, make a grand entrance. Mal and Simon are wearing Western-style tuxedos; Mal has a thick curly fake mustache plastered on. Zoe fits tightly (and uncomfortably) in a fancy black ball gown, her hair up; Jayne is in a butler's outfit; Kaylee - her puffy pink Shindig dress.

MAL Let's get to work.

INT. HOTEL-TYPE CASINO

The crew walk into a gaming lounge filled with elegantly dressed people gambling and chatting.

JAYNE (deep breath) You can jus' smell the money.

INT. DISPLAY ROOM

The display room is round with a beautiful, huge red/brown sparkling DIAMOND in the centre of the room, on a stand, surrounded by glass; one SECURITY GUARD in each 'corner' of the room with laser weapons. The gem is surrounded by a dozen people admiring its beauty. Mal is in the crowd - staring first at the gem, then at the four officers, and the three security cameras pointing down on him.

MAL (into com) Jayne? Kaylee? You're up.

INT. SECURITY CONTROL ROOM

The security control room contains a dozen computer monitors, each eyeing a different area. There is a SECURITY MANAGER sitting in front of the monitors. Jayne, now dressed as a waiter, brings a tray of FOOD into the control room.

JAYNE Special treat for senior staff from Captain Hathaway.

SECURITY MANAGER Well that is really nice of the Captain. Thank you!

He samples some food... and collapses onto the floor. Kaylee rushes in, reaches under the desk and connects a SMALL DEVICE to the back of one of the computers.

KAYLEE (into com) You're online! You gettin' this?

INT. A LARGE SHIP'S BRIDGE

Zoe stands on the bridge, surrounded by six unconscious bridge officers.

ZOE (into com)

Captain - we've got the bridge.

MAL (via com)

Okay Kaylee - now!

KAYLEE (into com)

Blackout in three... two... one.

Kaylee joins the red and white wires, the junction box sparks.

INT. HOTEL-TYPE CASINO - SAME TIME

Everything suddenly goes black. People panic. We see images every two seconds when the red emergency light flashes on.

INT. DISPLAY ROOM

Mal puts his hand through the hole in the glass...

MAL

Come to daddy...

...and grabs the large red-brown diamond, replacing it with a holoprojector that activates a fake image of a diamond.

INT. HOTEL-TYPE LOBBY

Six security officers are waiting in the flashing emergency lights, guns held high. A beat, and they all drop to the floor like marionettes with their strings cut. Two more security officers come running, shooting at unseen targets.

ZOE (OS)

Take cover!

Mal rushes the security officers by launching off a pillar, seemingly defying gravity.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY

There is a Mexican standoff between another mercenary crew (OTT, NICO, CLARENCE and GOWE) at the cargo bay entrance, and Mal, Zoe, and Jayne standing at different spots in the bay. All have weapons drawn, and no one looks amused. Simon and Kaylee peep from behind the entrance to the common area at the rear of the bay.

OTT

Enough threats, enough games. Just give me the Star, and you won't hear from me again.

MAL

I think we'll have to ask Kaylee first. Whadda ya say, Kaylee?

KAYLEE

Don't much like the idea of you kidnapping no little girl.

OTT

(cocking his gun)

That is à pity then.

Kaylee flips a switch behind her - the cargo bay goes dark, and sparks fly evérywhere. Screams. A gunshot. Silence.

Act One

EXT. SERENITY - ESTABLISHING - 72 HOURS EARLIER

Serenity is moving silently through the black toward us.

KAYLEE (VO)

(laughing) And then what?

INT. SERENITY - ENGINE ROOM

Simon sits in the hammock, Kaylee, lying across, feet on his lap, laughing really loudly.

SIMON

Well, then we had to try to get it out. There was nothing else we could do!

KAYLEE

(through the laughter)

How!?

SIMON

(starts laughing)

You don't want to know! Well... I guess I could tell you it involved an apron and a sense of humor.

KAYLEE

Oh god - that is the best story... I love your stories Simon.

SIMON

Thanks. I've been working on my delivery.

KAYLEE

No, really. I'm so glad you're here with... us on Serenity.

SIMON

It is starting to feel like home.

(beat)

And Lord knows River loves it here. Serenity's more a home to her than any she's known...

INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

SIMON (VO)

...and she's getting better.

RIVER walks through, barefoot, eating a pear, to:

INT. SERENITY - FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUOUS

-where ZOE and MAL are talking.

ZOE

...Just don't think it's a good idea to work with them is all. Mingo and Fanty may be more civilized, but they're far more ruthless than Badger ever was.

MAL

(angry, but softly)

You notice how thin everyone's getting of late? Engine parts flying every way which? We *need* the coin. You fixin' we go back to Badger on our hands and knees? He'll cut off our hands, shoot out our kneecaps... and then he'll *stop* laughing.

ZOE

I understand Sir, it's just... things've been getting a little too hairy round here what with the fugees and Feds flanking us... not to mention that bounty.

MAL

(puts a hand on her shoulder)

We made it to here. We'll make it a while more. It'll all work out. You'll see.

ZOE

Is that faith!?... Or are you just feeling lucky?

MAL

Been rubbin' Buddha's belly all morning.

Mal turns to go, and notices River is staring at them. He looks at River. She holds out the pear.

RIVER

Pear? It's free. None of that blue canned cupidity to clog your mind tight. I checked.

MAL

Swell. Keep up the good work.

WASH (OS)

(shouting from the bridge)

Coming up on atmo now, travelers.

The ship buckles and shakes a bit. The three have to hold a wall to keep balance.

WASH (OS, cont'd)

Welcome to Beaumonde.

EXT. SERENITY - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Serenity touches down on the crowded atoll amidst a number of other equally disreputable ships. The place is filled with every kind of immigrant culture and shop imaginable.

INT. MAIDENHEAD BAR - NIGHT

Mal and Zoe walk inside, take in the view, looking two stories straight down to a close group of tables and booths, and CorVue screens showing news and sports. The bar looks like it was carved out of an old mine.

BOUNCER

(motioning at Mal's holster)

Pistols in the guncheck. Collect 'em on your way out.

The guncheck works like a lunch automat: Mal sticks his gun in a drawer, pulls out a chit – the drawer closes and rotates, revealing another empty drawer for Zoe's gun. They move down the stairs, and through the noisy crowd.

ZOE

Over there.

MAL

Best we howdy then.

They push through the crowd to the back of the bar. FANTY stands when Mal and Zoe arrive at their table. He's young, tough – somewhere between gangster and fur trader.

FANTY

Ah, we finally meet the not-so-famous Malcolm Reynolds.

MINGO joins them, drinking a glass of spirits and bringing one for his brother. They are identical twins, indistinguishable save for slight differences in dress.

MINGO

Not-so-famous in the sense that a lot of people wouldn't mind seeing you departed.

MAL

(not intimidated)

Hello Fanty, Mingo. A pleasure. Heard much the same about y'all too.

MINGO

(points to Fanty)

He's Minao.

MAL

(sniffing the air)

No, he seems more Fanty-ish to me.

Mingo and Fanty look at each other, then back at Mal, mildly impressed.

MINGO

Word is you're trouble, Captain Reynolds.

FANTY

Too much trouble to bother with, some folks say.

MINGO

Now just why would we, respectable entrepreneurs of the modern business politic, risk our untarnished reputation-

FANTY

-to work with you?

MAL

Well, you know... people... exaggerate.

MINGO

You would have to prove your worth to us before we engaged in any... partnership arrangement.

ZOE

∠Of (disgusted) A test?

FANTY

(ignoring Zoe) Have you ever heard of the 'Earth Star', Captain?

MINGO

Oldest known diamond from Earth-that-Was... Over one hundred carats. Priceless.

FANTY

Unstealable, so they say.

MINGO

We'd like you to change that fact-

FANTY

-so to speak.

MAL

Zoe, do I look especially pigeon to you?

(not taking her eyes off Mingo)

Most certainly do not, sir.

Earth Star's locked up tight on Londinium in some fancible museum under a load of Alliance Security! We'd be lucky to get one foot in the door. No deal. Find our own way out. Let's go Zoe.

As they turn to leave-

MINGO

Oh ye of little faith, Captain.

FANTY

The stone's on temporary display for the next week-

MINGO

-on the Nu Du Shen.

MAL

(turning back)

That big prissy excuse for a boat?

MINGO

The same.

EXT. NU DU SHEN - ESTABLISHING

The NU DU SHEN < Queen of the Gamblers > is a massive luxury liner – five decks, almost 400 feet long - all sleek and shiny white with glistening bright reflective windows and gold finishings. It is the flagship of the Floating World Class Luxury Cruise Liners – ships designed to be hotels in space, catering to the wealthy elite of the Core.

She's in orbit around a core planet, picking up passengers. Shuttles arrive and leave to and from the planet.

ZOE (VO)

(cynical)

Still under massive Alliance security, I'm sure.

FANTY (VO)

Your problem, precious.

MINGO (VO)

As we said, a man has to prove himself worthy. Can't exactly be a cakewalk, or where's the worth?

There is a large rumbling whine as the Nu Du Shen springs to life. Many lights go on inside the ship's five decks. The engines glow hot white as she moves off.

FANTY (VO)

We can get you on board, but that's as far as it goes.

INT. MAIDENHEAD BAR - SAME TIME

Mal looks at Zoe, Zoe looks at Mal. Neither is one bit pleased with the situation presented to them.

FANTY

We have a contact on board. A Companion.

MINGO

She says she knows you, and is looking forward to working with you again. Here is the invitation she acquired to the gala banquet in three nights' time.

FANTY

And for god's sake, put some clean clothes on before you go. You two look like you've been rolling around in a-

Mal snatches the invitation, and walks off before Fanty can finish. Mingo and Fanty look at each other, smile, and clink glasses.

INT. SERENITY - COMMON AREA - NIGHT

The crew is sitting in the chairs of the common area outside the medical bay.

MAL

So that's the proposal. We want work from these snakes, we gotta dance for 'em first. Now this ain't the walk in, guns up, hand-over-the-goods sorta show that we're used to. This is complicated; technical... and I fear, is going to require more finesse than we may be able to squeeze.

JAYNE

Fi- what?

MAL

Exactly.

KAYLEE

Seems awful thorny. How are we-

We can't. We don't have the expertise to pull off a high tech take like this.

Mal

So, any suggestions?

JAYNE

Could blow a hole, snatch the diamond and make a run for it. Simple.

MAL

So. Any suggestions?

Jayne folds his arms and sulks.

KAYLEE

Ben Hicks?

MAL

I like the kid, but this is way outta his league.

Beat.

WASH

I... know a guy.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

MR. UNIVERSE – a young unkempt, sleep-deprived, over-caffeinated, but kinda sweet guy, is on the Wave in front of Wash. Mal and Zoe stand off to one side.

MR. UNIVERSE

Hobie? Hobie Washburne? Is that really you?! Shave my legs and call me Shirley - how you been, buddy!?

WASH

Hey, how you doing Manfred?

Mr. Universe coughs loudly and waits... looking irritated.

WASH (cont'd)

I mean...

(grinding his teeth)

"Mr. Universe".

MR. UNIVERSE I'm good. Better than good. Terrific. Stupendous. Got my own little moon here now. Run my own business so to say. What you been up to since flight school?

Well, I got this wacky job dodging bullets on a smuggling

WASH (cont'd)

ship... and I got married.

MR. UNIVERSE

Married!? You? No! No way! Hey good for you, brother! Guess you gotta go sometime. Me, I'm never getting fixed. Too much whining. Do this, do that. Computers now they don't whine. It's just yes or no. One or zero. Know what I mean?

Uh, yeah... Look, Universe, my crew and I could sorta use someone with your... abilities. We got a job, and we're in over our heads more 'n a little.

MR. UNIVERSE

What's the job, pal?

WASH

We're gonna steal the Earth Star.

MR. UNIVERSE

Well, this has been fun, us chatting. I ain't trying to break into that museum... again. Have a good funeral, and I'll be sure to send flowers to your wife. She is pretty, right?

WASH

Uh, yes... uh, no, I mean... Look - this heist. It's a challenge. Never been done before. The Star is on some fancy new ship – the Nu Du Shen. They say the security can't be beat. They say the Star is <u>unstealable</u>.

MR. UNIVERSE

Ooh... The Nu Du Shen. That changes things. (beat)

Sounds fun. Where do I sign up?

Wash looks at Mal and Zoe. They nod, approvingly.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)

Here's my address. You're going to get caught in the ion cloud. It'll play merry hob with your radar, but pretty lights and a few miles after you'll be right in my orbit. Oh and Hobie? You know 'Manfred' wasn't my real name anyway, right?

WASH

(sighs)

I know. See va soon.

Wash turns the screen off.

ZOE

Good job,

(beat) 'Hobie'.

EXT. SERENITY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Serenity passes out of the thick ION CLOUD of a small moon - home to Mr. Universe - flies down, and lands on a small PLATFORM surrounded by satellite dishes and antennae.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S PAD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Universe's pad is a large, almost unfurnished room containing lots of VIDEO SCREENS all across the front and rear walls with many different images, large comfy couches toward the back, a set of drums, a small table with liquor on it, and a pull-down bed on the side – the ideal techno geek's bachelor pad. As soon as Wash walks in, Mr. Universe, waiting at the door, jumps into his arms.

MR. UNIVERSE

(squeezing Wash)

Hey buddy! Have you grown? You look *good*. What's different, what's different - ah, yes. No mustache! Good good. Good for ya. Always freaked me out a smidge, that thing.

WASH

Great to see you too, 'U'.

Wash moves forward into Mr. Universe's home, and the rest of the crew, sans River, file in tentatively behind him.

MR. UNIVERSE

(eyeing all the folk behind Wash)

Well don't be shy! Come in, come in. Wélcome to Casa de Ooniversa - my humble abode...

(sees Zoe)

Well, who's this pretty lady? Growl.

WASH

Universe, I'd like you to meet my-

Mr. Universe spanks Zoe lightly on her *pi gu*, and in a flash Zoe catches his hand, twists it behind his back and holds him - almost breaking his arm.

WASH (cont'd)

...wife.

MR. UNIVERSE

(pained whisper)

Nice to meet you... Ma'am.

Zoe lets go. Mal is smiling.

MAL

I'm Mal - uh, Captain Malcolm Reynolds - and this here's the rest of my fine crew - Kaylee, our mechanic-

MR. UNIVERSE

(kissing her hand)

Enchante. Gorgeous.

Kaylee loves this gentlemanly compliment, and blushes.

ΜΔΙ

Jayne, our... security advisor, and Simon, our doctor.

Simon shakes hands. Jayne just nods.

SIMON

How do you do?

RIVER walks through the entranceway - barefoot and curious. Mal sees her and his eyes go wide. We get the impression she was supposed to stay on Serenity.

MAL

And this is... River... Our resident... uh... escape artist.

MR. UNIVERSE

(walking up to River)
My my, aren't you a pretty one?

RIVER

(imitating Universe's expression and

speech)

I certainly am at that and don't I know it! Hey there handsome! How d'ya do?

She shakes Universe's hand vigorously and grins ear to ear. Simon moves to intercept.

MR. UNIVERSE

(while his hand is being shaken)

She's cute. Can I keep her?

SIMON

No.

JAYNE

Maybe.

RIVER

Maybe!

SIMON

(more to River this time)

No... And let go.

River let's go of Universe's hand.

MR. UNIVERSE

Hey, Hobie, remember that girl's locker room camera!?

(a little uncomfortable)

Uh, yeah.

MR. UNIVERSE

With the-

WASH

Yeah.

MR. UNIVERSE

(getting excited)

And then she-

WASH

(trying to end the conversation)

Yup.

MR. UNIVERSE

(laughing)

Your pi qu was red for a month!

WASH

That it was. My pi gu... kinda like my face... right now.

Zoe smiles. She's got ammunition for later.

MAL

Sorry to cut short the reunion -(looks over at Wash)

And boy, would I love to hear that story in detail later but can we...?

MR. UNIVERSE

Yes. Absolutely. Sure. Let's move over here.

They all go sit down on the long couch at the back. Universe pulls out a wireless keyboard and starts typing frantically. A large holo-projected image of a blueprint pops up in front of them.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)
I managed to... stumble upon the floor plan for the Nu Du Shen on the Cortex, and might I say - awesome ship. If I wasn't wanted on fifteen worlds I'd definitely hack myself a ticket.

KAYLEE

(looking at the blueprint) This is amazing... How did you-

MR. UNIVERSE

You can't stop the signal, sweetness. It's spinning all around us. Just gotta know how to pluck it out the air is all. Here, check these puppies out.

Universe hands each crew member a small earpiece - fitting snugly inside the ear. Some of the crew insert their piece.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)

Untraceable, near invisible com'system. Continually rotating frequencies. Just push the button like this to talk.

He pushes a button in his ear.

JAYNE

Wow. Comin' through crystal.

MR. UNIVERSE

Uh... they're... not on yet.

Universe punches a few keys, and a detail of one room comes up.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)

Anyway, you kids picked a corker here to ransack. See this?

(points at blueprint)

This here is where the twenty members of the Alliance High Security team are stationed to guard the Star. Four stationed at all times inside the very room it's kept. Not to mention security cameras, floor pressure sensors, and secure digital locks.

MAL

Can't you use your... special skills to hack into the

MAL (cont'd) security cameras, the doors?

MR. UNIVERSE

Nope. Closed system. The ship ain't connected to the Cortex for that very reason.

MAL

Oh.

MR. UNIVERSE

Indeed... So, two cents anyone?

Silence. Everyone is stumped.

MAL

Well Doc over here could-

SIMON

What? No, no. I'm not getting involved in your heist.

EXT. NU DU SHEN - ESTABLISHING

The Nu Du Shen is in orbit of the beautiful multicolored *Cai* < *Rainbow* > Nebula. As it passes our view, we see almost every light is on inside the five decks, and as it gets closer we see a lot of activity through the windows - swimming, eating, gambling, companioning...

MAL (VO)

Yes, you are, doctor. We're gonna be needin' a girly coreeducated man like you on board a ship like this.

EXT. CAI NEBULA - CONTINUOUS

Serenity is hiding in the Cai Nebula – a dense collection of crystalline debris at the perfect distance from the sun so as to reflect many dazzling colors – a permanent rainbow. One of the shuttles breaks off Serenity, and moves out.

SIMON (VO)

My job is on Serenity, cleaning up your mess - which is usually enough of a job for anyone!

EXT. NU DU SHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The shuttle docks with the underside of the Nu Du Shen.

MAL (VO)

You wanna stay on my crew, your job is what I tell you.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK ONE, LOBBY - 17:30

Two grand doors swing open. Mal, Zoe, Jayne, Simon and Kaylee, all well dressed, make a grand entrance into the luxury liner. Mal and Simon are wearing Westernstyle tuxedos; Mal has a thick curly fake mustache plastered on. Zoe fits tightly (and uncomfortably) in a fancy black ball gown, her hair up; Jayne is in a butler's outfit; Kaylee - her puffy pink Shindig dress. The lobby leads up into the upper decks via a transparent grand twirling staircase, lit underneath by bright white light.

MAL

Let's get to work.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRCASE

The crew arrives at the security checkpoint.

SECURITY OFFICER

Invitations, please.

SIMON

วมMOIN (snaps his fingers) Gustav!

JAYNE

(in his best posh British accent)

Yes, sir... of course, sir.

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM

The crew is sitting around the table.

JAYNE

How come I gotta be the gorram butler?

SIMON

Because the less you say, the better.

JAYNE

Wha's that s'pose to mean!?

MAL

Means your momma didn't hold too much faith in the idea of gravity, seein' how considerably often you fell on your head as a young 'un.

SIMON

Now repeat after me...

(posh British accent)

'Yes, sir, Yes, ma'am, Of course, si-'

JAYNE

Ain't no one's butler. Mal, tell him I ain't-

END FLASHBACK

Jayne hands the security officer the invitation. The officer glances at it, then back at the motley crew.

SECURITY OFFICER

The... Brighton party?

SIMON

(eloquently)

Dr. Hedgefield Brighton the Third, and staff.

SECURITY OFFICER

Please step this way, doctor.

The guard ushers Simon through a metal detector, and proceeds to pat him down.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

MR. UNIVERSE

We got ourselves a nasty little catch twenty-two, Mallaroo.

MAL

Uh... don't...

(goofy pause) call me Mallaroo.

ZOE

What is it?

MR. UNIVERSE

Mallaroo? Something I just made up. Do that sorta thing all the t-

ZOE

(not one bit amused)

The catch, genius.

MR. UNIVERSE

Oh. I knew th-. Right. The catch. No guns, guys and gals. Blueprint shows metal detectors at every airlock. You'll never get them on board.

JAYNE

No guns!?

(beat)

How 'bout grenades?

MAL

(ignoring Jayne)

Show me that blueprint again.

The blueprint comes up on the holoprojector.

MAL (cont'd)

Magnify.

The security station's image zooms up into striking detail.

MAL (cont'd) (looks at Kaylee)

I mav have a plan...

Zoe looks at the blueprint, then at Mal. She does not look convinced.

END FLASHBACK

The security officer finishes with Simon, and moves to pat down Jayne.

SECURITY OFFICER

Next.

(takes Mal's invitation)

A Mr. Règinald Lamm and wives?

MAL

And beautiful.

SECURITY OFFICER

I'm sorry?

MAL

(thick Southern accent) Mr. Reginald Lamm and his BÉAUTIFUL wives.

Mal walks through the metal detectors. Gets the pat down. Then Zoe. Then Kaylee... but Kaylee stops short - she can't fit through the narrow gap between the two sides of the metal detector because of her wide puffy pink dress.

KAYLEE

(flustered, embarrassed) Oh, I'm sorry! How embarrassing!

The security officer doesn't know what to do. After a beat-

SECURITY OFFICER

Uh, right. Move it along.

-and allows Kaylee to walk around...

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK ONE, GRAND STAIRCASE - 17:36

The five of them make their way up the staircase in a hurry. When they get to the top Mal turns to Kaylee.

MAL

Good job, Kaylee, darlin'. Knew that layer cake'd be a useful purchase someday.

Kaylee reaches under her dress and pulls out two handguns, hands one each to Mal and Jayne, and then a small shotgun to Zoe.

KAYLEE

(smiling) I recall, Badger paid for it, 'Cap'n Tightpants'. Jus' glad to be wearing her again anyhow!

ZOE

(taps her earpiece)

Universe?

MR. UNIVERSE (via com)

Here a-waiting, my lovely.

ZOE

We're in.

Act Two

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 17:47

The crew walk into the gaming lounge, a massive room with many games to try your luck at, packed with a crowd of loud, well-dressed socialites, waiters, staff, and security. At the one end, the casino flows seamlessly into a high-end restaurant. At the other, a vault-like door leads into the display room housing 'artof-the-week.'

JAYNE

(deep breath)

You can jus' smell the money.

Mal fidgets with his bow tie, then his shirt. Kaylee notices and turns to fix his tie.

KAYLEE

You look real handsome, Captain. Don't worry. I'm sure she misses you too!

MAL

(faking) She!? She who?!

KAYLEE

You know! Our contact...

Mal fakes ignorance.

MAL

Oh. Yeah. We're scheduled to meet... our contact... in less'n a half hour at that roulette table. Y'all can mingle. Blend in. Regroup on my signal.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - 17:47

River stands at the entrance to the bridge, holding something hidden behind her back. Wash is in his chair.

RIVER

Too empty out there.

WASH

(spins around)

Uh, do you have a knife or any other sharp instrument with liver-piercing capabilities in your possession?

River gives him a 'Are you crazy?' look and holds out a pear.

WASH (cont'd)
Then, sure! Come on in and sit with Uncle Wash! Just don't... touch anything.

Wash takes the pear and bites is somewhat suspiciously. River picks up Wash's plastic T-Rex. Shakes it by her ear.

WASH (cont'd)

(grabbing the T-Rex)
Especially Brutus! He doesn't like to be manhandled, do you Brutus?

River looks at Wash like he is the craziest person alive. Beat.

RIVER

The gambling gueen will take it all from you. She waits in the shadow...

WASH

Uh huh. Yeah, well this was... fun...

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, BATHING POOL - 17:55

The bathing pool is a large semi-circular indoor heated swimming area, complete with its own waterfall. The pool is bordered on one side by a glass wall looking out into the black (currently replaced by a breathtaking view of the Cai Nebula). There are CorVues on the outer edges for people to lie in the pool and watch. There are tables and deck chairs looking out over the pool - an extension of the restaurant.

Kaylee is sitting with her feet dipped in the pool, chewing on a chicken leg; a PLATE piled high with delicacies sits next to her. She seems happy. She watches as Simon walks past her talking to TWO WOMEN, and doesn't see her.

SIMON

...well yes, the tournaments on Sinhon are simply the event of the year. You really should try to get there sometime. It's exquisite.

WOMAN #1

You know, I think I will! Thank you Mister...?

SIMON

Oh please, call me S- Hedgefield.

WOMAN #2

So, Hedgefield, you seem to know your way around the system... Have you ever been with a Companion?

Kaylee's eyes go wide.

SIMON

(smiling)

Why, yes. I have.

Kaylee's eyes go wider.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - 17:55

Wash is focusing intently on dodging the debris in the nebula, so the conversation with River loses momentum, and she gets bored. River sneaks up behind Wash and puts her hands over his eyes.

RIVER

Guess who?!

WASH

River! Cut it out, will ya? Something that tends to help most pilots is the ability to see the huge chunks of nebula coming dangerously close to the ship.

RIVER

You worry too much. Ninny.

WASH

What did you call me?

RIVER

The causal aspects of personality are obscure. Puzzling. The spectrum's wide.

(looks at the floor)

My toes are sprightly!

WASH

(not taking his attention away from flying)
Yes, well... do you want to... take your sprightly toes and
march them off to, say, your bunk so Uncle Wash can get
back to the flying thingy?

RIVER

(laughing)

Oh you...

(beat; stops laughing)

Ninny.

River sticks out her tongue. Wash, in retaliation pulls a contorted face.



INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, BATHING POOL - 17:57

The two women walk off, giggling, leaving Simon standing alone. He sees Kaylee, and moves toward her, but then spots a DARK-HAIRED GIRL sitting at a table by herself, her back towards Simon.

SIMON

River?

He puts his hand on the girl's shoulder, she turns around. It's not River.

SIMON (cont'd)

What- Oh. I'm... so sorry. I thought you were...

CHLOE

That's okay. I'm bored stiff here anyway. Nice to meet you, handsome. What do I call you?

SIMON

Uh, I'm Hedgefield.

CHLOE Hi, Hedgefield. I'm Chloe. So, how come you're here at this big waste of money and time?

SIMON

How... old are you Chloe?

CHLOE

Fourteen. Turning fifteen in a month though.

(taps Simon on the nose, winks)

And it's rude in most cultures to ask a girl her age, you know.

SIMON

Ah. Sorry.

CHLOE

S'okay. I'm just teasing you. You wanna sit? My dad makes me come to these *yu ben* <stupid> parties all the time. I hate dressing up. Éverything's so fake. The only good part is the dancing... I love the dancing.

Simon just stares at her for a beat.

CHLOE (cont'd)

What? Did I say something rude and inappropriate... again? I am such a boob.

SIMON

(staring into Chloe's eyes)

No, it's... you remind me so much of my... before she...

EXT. SERENITY - ESTABLISHING - 17:57

Serenity sits in the nebula. A large chunk of debris suddenly hits the hull.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - SAME TIME

Wash is sitting, River is standing when the sudden impact knocks the ship about.

WASH

(looking at the monitors)

What the-!?

RIVER

(touching the wall)

It's the rain.

WASH

The debris cloud from the nebula. I gotta move us into a

RIVER

I love to get lost in the rain. I can fix it.

River sits in the co-pilot's chair, starts pushing buttons, and pulls on the throttle.

WASH

River, what the hay do you think you- Oh!

EXT. SERENITY - SAME TIME

Serenity bobs up and down, moving fast through the nebula. She comes up close to a large piece of debris and accelerates directly toward it on a collision course.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - SAME TIME

Wash pulls the throttle back hard, and Serenity just makes it over the top of the chunk of debris.

WASH

Are you out of your mind!? I mean... more than usual!?

RIVER

(looks at Wash like he's nuts)

I could have done it.

WASH

If you couldn't, I wouldn't want to explain it to Mal.

(looks out at the debris)

...S'posè I wouldn't have to.

Uncomfortable beat. Then...

RIVER

Ninny.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:02

Mal sits at the roulette table, fiddling with his tie and cufflinks. A WOMAN sits down next to him, and whispers in his ear.

WOMAN

Hello, husband.

Mal jumps backward, reaching reflexively for his gun as he finds himself face-toface with SAFFRON, dressed in beautiful, elegant clothing, her hair in a complex coif.

MAL

You're...!?

SAFFRON

Early. Yes. I know. I'm just so excited to be working with you again... partner.

FLASHBACK - INT. MAIDENHEAD BAR

Saffron sits with Mingo and Fanty.

MINGO

For this to work, we'll need ourselves a patsy, Terese, darlin'.

FANTY

Someone who'll go along for the ride. Easy to con.

MINGO

Be a good distraction for the Feds.

SAFFRON

(smiling)

I have just the patsy...

END FLASHBACK

MAL

I still got sunburn on my rump from the last time we was 'partners'.

SAFFRON

Maybe you'd like to show me some time, darling?

Give me one good reason not to lay your lying carcass out on this here table... 'darling'.

SAFFRON

For starters, you'd be arrested. Also, you really have no choice. Or, maybe you do - if you want to skulk back to Mingo and Fanty, tail between your legs, empty-handed. (whispering in Mal's ear)

You. Need. Me.

A beat, then Mal relaxes.

MAL

Know I'm gonna regret this...

(into the com)

Okay peòple. I've made contact. Take your positions.

KAYLEE (via com)

Tell 'Nara I say hi!

MAL (into com)

Um... Saffron says hi, everyone.

KAYLEE (via com)

I'm sorry - WHAT?!?

WASH (via com)

Ai ya, hwai luh <Sh** on my head>!SIMON (via com) You've got to be kidding...

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - 18:09

RIVER

(yawning) You're boring.

WASH

No I'm not! I'm the most spontaneous, unboring man you ever will meet. You don't even have a clue what I'm going to do next!

RIVER

Yes, I do.

Wash suddenly shoves both his hands in the air, but River does the same thing at the same time. What follows is an impromptu dance with River mirroring Wash's every move. Finally:

WASH RIVER

Boo! (at the same time)

WASH

How'd you-!?

River gets up and starts out the bridge. Wash just sits there, his jaw agape. As she leaves:

RIVER

Boring!

WASH

(to himself quietly)

Boo.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:09

Zoe approaches Mal and Saffron, glaring in Saffron's direction.

70F

This some kind of *húli jīng* joke, sir?

MAL

You see me laughing?

70F

Give me one good reason-

SAFFRON

We've already been through all that. Relax, dear, this is a party!

ZOE

This is starting to smell, Captain. Should cut and run. Can't trust her.

MAL

Got the better of her last time, didn't we?

SAFFRON

(smilina)

Yes, you did, you sly, sly man you! So what could you possibly be afraid of, hon?

MAL

Now, if you'll excuse us, Yo-Saf-Bridge, Zoe and I have some thievin' to attend to.

SAFFRON

Certainly.

Mal and Zoe, arm in arm, walk away and approach a regal-looking, white-haired MAN wearing a white uniform and a captain's hat.

MAL

(thick Southern accent)
Captain Hathaway? Allow me to introduce myself. I am Reginald Lamm the Third and this is my beautiful bride, Cupid.

Zoe gives Mal a nasty look, then smiles and curtseys for Hathaway.

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

Good evening. A pleasure. Welcome aboard. If there is anything I can ge-

Zoe trips forward and falls into Hathaway.

ZOE

Oh forgive me, Captain! I'm so clumsy these days, I don't know what came over me.

Mal helps Zoe and Captain Hathaway up.

We've been samplin' some of the excellent merlot in your restaurant, if you take my meanin'.

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

(chuckling) Quite all right. I don't know how you ladies manage to walk in those shoes anyhow! Goo'd evening, sir, madam.

Hathaway moves off to greet another guest.

ZOE

Cupid?

MAL

(smiling)

Suits you.

(into com) Simon?

Simon is sitting at the bar at the other end of the casino. Zoe moves off in his direction.

MAL (via com)

You're on.

Simon nods to Saffron, who is playing roulette. She winks, and suddenly drops to the floor and starts having a seizure. People panic around her -

MAN #1

Someone help! This woman is-

WOMAN #1

(screams)

WOMAN #2

MAN #2

She's having a fit!

Put a spoon in her mouth!

SECURITY OFFICER

What's going on here?!

Saffron's body buckles, and she flies forward into the security officer, scratching him in the face, leaving linear bleeding cuts.

SECURITY OFFICER (cont'd)

(jumping back)
Lao tyen yeh! <Jesus!>

Simon quickly arrives at the scene.

SIMON

I'm a doctor. This woman is having a grand-mal seizure. She needs intravenous lorazepam at once!

SECURITY OFFICER

Our infirmary is on deck five. Can she be moved?

Simon nods and he and the Security Officer pick Saffron up to carry her, but they struggle with her writhing so much.

ZOE

Let me help.

Zoe takes some of the weight as the three of them carry Saffron toward the elevator. Mal casually takes a seat at the bar. A woman smiles at him from across the room, he smiles back... but behind the woman he spots a smirking familiar face: the female mercenary NICO.

MAL

(to himself)

Oh. This is getting all too coincidental.

A BALD MAN sits himself next to Mal.

MAN (OS)

Hello, Malcolm.

Mal puts his hand inside his suit jacket.

MAL

(without looking at the man) I'm tired of being surprised today, Ott. A *goushi duī* <pile of dog faeces> such as yourself better have a damn good reason for being here.

OTT

Can a man not take a vacation?

Mal cocks his gun still with his hand inside his suit jacket.

MAL

Not a good reason.

OTI

You cause a scene, you get thrown off the ship. No diamond. I'm just here to... ensure things go smoothly.

MAL

You get in my way, a 'scene' will be the least of your concerns, dong ma?

Nico walks up to Ott. She's in a beautiful silver low cut dress.

NICO

(nods)

Mal.

MAL

Nico. You look pretty... Almost pass for a woman there.

Nico sneers. Ott whispers something into Nico's ear. She smiles, and walks off.

MAL (cont'd) You or your little pet there so much as twitch, I'll know it... and then so will you. Have a grand 'vacation'.

Mal gets up and disappears into the casino crowd.

INT. NU DU SHEN - ELEVATOR - 18:15

Zoe, Simon and the Security Officer carry an 'unconscious' Saffron. The elevator is going up.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

Deck five comes up on the holomonitor.

MR. UNIVERSE

Now, you'll need to get into the bridge, which is on Deck Five. Problem is, the elevator's controlled by bridge personnel, and only senior staff are allowed on Deck Five for security reasons.

SIMON

That looks like a medical bay. There's a surgical bed.

MR. UNIVERSE

Yup, the infirmary is on Deck Five, too.

SIMON

Really...

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, INFIRMARY - 18:16

Saffron sits up.

SAFFRON

That was fun.

ZOE

You just remember, biao <tart>, my scattergun don't trust you much near o' nowhere. Cap'n says to watch you, and you step an inch left or right - it will be your last.

SAFFRON

Relax, sweetie. Tonight, we're on the same team.

ZOE

I gotta work with you, don't have to like it. Let's go.

SIMON

Will you two be all right?

Zoe nods, and Simon heads for the door.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - 18:18

The display room is round with a beautiful, huge red/brown sparkling EARTH STAR DIAMOND in the centre of the room, on a stand, surrounded by glass; one SECURITY GUARD in each 'corner' of the room with laser weapons. The gem is surrounded by a dozen people admiring its beauty. Mal is in the crowd - staring first at the gem, then taking in the four officers, and the three security cameras pointing down on him.

MAL (into com) Jayne? Kaylee? You're up.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, KITCHEN - 18:20

Jayne and Kaylee walk into the kitchen from the restaurant.

WAITER

Can I help you?

KAYLEE

Oh, I'm sorry! I Must be lost. Was lookin' for the little girls' room.

WAITER

And your friend?

Jayne blindsides the waiter, pistol-whips him, and he goes down.

JAYNE

Yeah. Me too.

Kaylee looks uncomfortable; Jayne drags the waiter into a pantry and slams the door.

MR UNIVERSE (via com)
What!? What was that? That sounded like fighting? What did I miss? Guys? Oh, gorramit!

JAYNE

Okay. One down, one to go.

INT. SERENITY - DINING AREA - 18:20

A very bored River sits at the table, strumming her fingers on the wood. Suddenly – as if getting a great idea - she gets up and moves through the dining room, and into:

INT. SERENITY - AFT HALL - CONTINUOUS

She turns to the passage leading to the upper cargo bay catwalk, but stops suddenly - as if she senses something. She turns her head back to look in the direction of the dining room and foredeck hall. Nothing is there. She continues on.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FOUR, LOBBY - 18:29

Jayne and Kaylee come up the stairs, both wearing waiter uniforms and carrying trays of food.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

Mr. Universe brings up the schematics to Deck Four.

MR. UNIVERSE

Now, to get me in the picture you'll need to hardwire me into the system. To do that, you need to get to this Security Control Room on Deck Four. Once I'm in I can take care of those pesky little cameras for ya.

END FLASHBACK

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, LOBBY - 18:29

Zoe and Saffron are outside the door to the Bridge of the Nu Du Shen.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

MR. UNIVERSE

The bridge door is sealed from the inside. To open it, you need a senior officer's access card-

MAL

I can get that... This may actually work!

MR. UNIVERSE

Are you forgetting the DNA lock on the display room door?

MAL

I... can't get that.

MR. UNIVERSE

Yup – latest Alliance tech. Samples your DNA, and if you are an identical twin of the Captain, you get in. Otherwise, forget it.

MAL

Mingo and Fanty say that our... contact will have a way through the DNA lock.

KAYLEE

You can say her name, Captain.

MAL

Inara. Inara, Inara, Inara. Happy?

KAYLEE

With you - not 'specially. But to see 'Nara?!

KAYLEE (cont'd)

(smiles)

Does an ionizer self-regulate?!

MAI

Uh... I assume it does.

END FLASHBACK

Zoe inserts an ACCESS CARD into the Bridge door lock.

FLASHBACK - INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:09

Zoe 'trips' and falls into Captain Hathaway. As Mal helps her up, she lifts an access card out Captain Hathaway's jacket pocket.

END FLASHBACK

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FOUR, SECURITY CONTROL ROOM - 18:31

The security control room contains a dozen computer monitors, each eyeing a different area on the ship. A SECURITY MANAGER sits in a chair watching the monitors. Jayne brings his tray of FOOD into the control room.

SECURITY MANAGER

What is this?

JAYNE

Special treat for senior staff from Captain Hathaway.

SECURITY MANAGER

Well that is really nice of the Captain. Thank you!

He samples some food... and collapses onto the floor.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

SIMON

(holding a vial)

This is à potent benzódiazepine derivative.

WASH

Wowee. I always wanted one of those! A benzidiclomipine diminutive!

SIMON

(sighs)

It's a sleeping drug. Eat it, or inject it, and bam, you're on the floor... and best of all, it causes retrograde amnesia - you won't remember anything when you wake up for twenty minutes before you took it... Remember I used it on you once, Jayne?

JAYNE

Huh?

SIMON

Precisely. Wipes your short-term memory clean.

MR. UNIVERSE

(smiling)

Now I thought I knew everything.

END FLASHBACK

Kaylee reaches under the desk and connects a SMALL DEVICE to the back of one of the computers.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD - 18:31

MR. Universe is sitting in his chair, looking all bored. Suddenly, his monitors all come to life with images from the security feed on the Nu Du Shen. There is a video image of Kaylee on the screen in front of Mr. Universe.

> KAYLEE (via com) Universe - you're online! You gettin' this?

> > MR. UNIVERSE

Yeah baby baby baby...

(into cóm)

You are live across the 'Verse pretty lady... smile!

He rubs his hands together.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)

Can't stop the signal...

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - 18:31

Wash is maneuvering Serenity. Suddenly, a SHUTTLE zooms across and past.

WASH

What the-!? RIVER!

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, LOBBY - 18:31

The door to the bridge hisses open.

BRIDGE OFFICER (OS)

(from the bridge)

Hello? Captain, is that you?

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

MR. UNIVERSE

The bridge holds six armed officers at all times. How d'you plan to take 'em all down?

ZOF

(deadpan) S'pose I'll just have to shoot really, really fast.

MR. UNIVERSE

Oh... Makes sense.

END FLASHBACK

Zoe sneaks a peek around the door - sees seven officers running operations on the bridge.

(whispers to Saffron)

You got a plan?

BRIDGE OFFICER (OS)

(from the bridge)

The door. Go check it out.

SAFFRON As a matter of fact, I do.

Saffron slips a small round DEVICE from her dress, and rolls it into the bridge.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, BRIDGE - 18:31

The little ball rolls into the bridge and stops when it hits the foot of one of the officers. She looks down, and before she manages to get a word out, the ball releases a pink gas, and she drops to the floor. The rest of the bridge crew drop to the floor seconds later.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Saffron walk in and see all the officers unconscious on the floor. The gas is gone. Zoe looks at Saffron, impressed.

SAFFRON

(smiling)

Call it 'Liquid Lipstick'.

ZOE (into com)

Captain, we've got the bridge.

Act Three

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:49

River is at the Mah Jongg table, a large pile of chips next to her, dressed in a regal red sari, short black skirt and red sandals (quite possibly clothing left behind by Inara). River is gathering a crowd around her - and it looks like she is having a lot of fun.

RIVER

Mah Jongg!

DEALER

The young lady of luck has another kong... no wait! It's a crazy monkey! Unbelievable!

The dealer sends a pile of chips down to River. The other players look miserable.

DEALER (cont'd)

You will keep playing, yes?

RIVER

(excited)

Of course, dear sir. Deal the tiles, s'il vous plait!

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, BATHING POOL - 18:49

Simon sits at a table alone sipping a daiguiri. He checks his watch anxiously.

CHLOE (OS)

Yeah, I can't wait for tonight's so-called party to be over either.

Simon spins round. Smiles.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Sooner it starts, the sooner it's over.

SIMON

Oh, hi again, Chloe.

Chloe sits down.

CHLOE

See that man over there?

(points to Captain Hathaway)
That's my Dad. Bigwig Alliance commander during the war. Now he's retired and running this ship like it's an Alliance battle cruiser.

SIMON

Great...

CHLOE

Not really. The more promotions he got, the more I had to come to these *hwong tong <*ridiculous> parties.

SIMON

Well, at least the food's nice.

CHLOE

(giggles, winks)

You're swai < cute>.

SIMON

(smiles)

You're fourteen.

Chloe giggles again, and pulls her chair closer to Simon.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:50

DEALER

An Imperial Mah Jongg Suite! Unbelievable! I have never seen such luck...

(quietly into com)

Security to the Mah Jongg table. Possible finagler here.

He hands River another large pile of chips.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - 18:50

Mal's in a quiet corner, talking on his com.

WASH (via com)

Mal! We got a problem. River's gone AWOL.

Uh, sorry. I don't think I quite heard that right. River's what, exactly?

WASH (via com)

She stole one of the shuttles and took it for a little

Mal hears and then sees the commotion in the casino - three security officers and a whole crowd of people curiously standing around a girl... Mal has to look again - he can't believe it.

MAL (into com)
I think I might know where she is...

Mal moves out of the display room, walking straight towards River.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:51

Jayne sees Mal and rushes toward him.

JAYNE

Hey, Mal! Mal! Sorry took so long. Had to-

MAI

Jayne, how many times I gotta tell you ix-nay on the almay?

JAYNE

(puzzling it out)

Ix-nay...?

MAL

No. Using. Real. Names. Got it?

JAYNE

Sorry. Forgot. We ready for the-(sees River)

Is that-?!

MAL

It is. You know how you wanted a distraction...

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

JAYNE

You want me to do that in a room fulla people, I'm gonna need a distraction.

MAL

Doctor - this is your cue.

SIMON

What exactly am I supposed to do? Flap my arms around and moo like a cow!?

MA

(smiling)

If needs be. You'll think of something. You worry too much.

END FLASHBACK

MAL (cont'd)

Doc's late, so I think this might be your in.

JAYNE (smiling)

Rijiaht. On it.

Jayne moves off, walks into:

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Most of the visitors and some of the guards are looking out into the casino where River is causing a flurry. Jayne walks into the display room and right up to the Earth Star. He reaches under his jacket and looks around.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:52

Mal walks over to the commotion, where two security officers are holding River. Captain Hathaway steps into the fray – and looks River in the eye.

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

Now just what is going on here, young lady?!

MAL

(thick Southern accent)

Jus' what do ya thank you're doin', Sherry? I told ya ta stay in the room, didn't I?

SECURITY OFFICER

Sir, do you know this girl?

RIVER

(thick Southern accent)

I'm sorry, Poppa, truly I am. I just got so lonely down there in the... room.

MAL

Don't want no excuses! You know you're too young ta be gamblin'! I try ta raise ya right, but ya jus' go and get all blinkered on me! Why I aughta fix you to a chainlink fen-

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

Enough, sir. If she returns all the chips she won, we'll call it a day. But keep her out of trouble, and out of my casino.

MAL

Darn tootin'! Don't you worry none, kind sir, Sherry'll be suitably punished. Yessiree, indeed! Now come along girl!

Mal grabs River by the arm, and walks her off.

RIVER

That was fun!

(beat, serious now)

But the gambling queen will get you...

MAL

If I had a credit for every time I heard that... Now let's go find that no-show of a brother of yours.

MAL (cont'd)

(into com)

Doctor - you still alive?

SIMON (via com)

Oh, God! I got... in conversation. Am I late?

MAL

No frettin', doctor, turns out we didn't need your barnyard impersonations after all. We had a better distraction come our way.

SIMON (via com)

What was that?

MAL

You'll see soon enough. Where are you?

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, BATHING POOL - CONTINUOUS

Mal escorts River past a CorVue. On screen is a Blue Sun Cola commercial:

CORVUE

(singsong jingle) Live life with Blue Sun. Blue Sun is Number One. Drink the Cola that is Blue Sun. You'll soon be having fun!

River stops short, mesmerized by the commercial. She can't take her eyes off it—

MAL

Come on girl! No time for any more bends here.

Mal drags her away, snapping her out of the trance.

Mal brings River to Simon, who is sitting with Chloe.

MAL (cont'd)

Believe this belongs to you.

SIMON

(can't believe his eyes) How -!? Wha-!? RIVER!?

Got enough to do without the babysitting, Doc. Take care of her.

RIVER

Simon! I had fun. I gambled!

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - 18:53

Jayne pulls out his gun and shoots the large window overlooking the nebula. Air and loose objects begin to get sucked out into the black.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

JAYNE

Why do I shoot the window again?

MAL

'Cause we can't exactly steal the diamond with everyone and four guards in the room, now can we?

JAYNE

So I shoot the window out an' then what?

MR. UNIVERSE

The backup system kicks in. Metal shutters come down and seal all the windows airtight. The display room is evacuated, and sealed. Then the security system activates.

MAL

What security system?

MR. UNIVERSE

Oh, not much. Just floor pressure sensors. One step, and xenon gas fills the room - displaces all the Oh-two. (grabs his neck and makes gasping noises) Well, you get the idea...

JAYNE

(smiling)

I'll get my armor-piercin' rounds.

END FLASHBACK

Everyone (including the guards) evacuates. Jayne barely makes it out the room as the door locks itself. The green laser sensors on the floor turn on.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, BRIDGE - 18:53

Kaylee is standing by a junction box, with wires exposed.

MR. UNIVERSE (via com)

...now touch the red one to the white one, KayKay...

INTERNAL COM

Bridge, come in. Security Station Alpha reporting... Bridge?

Zoe looks at Saffron, as if to say 'do something'. Saffron picks up the bridge's comlink.

SAFFRON

This is the bridge, copy Station Alpha.

INTERNAL COM

Bridge, you failed to check in at the regular interval. Everything stable your end?

SAFFRON

Calm as can be. Saw you had a little flare up in the casino, but the Captain sorted it out. We're trying to do the paperwork. You know Hathaway.

INTERNAL COM

What a gorram <stickler for details>! No problem. Out.

ZOE

Nicely done.

SAFFRON

Told ya we were on the same team, silly!

ZOE

I guess when you want a lie, call a pro. You're needed on the casino floor. Go help Mal. Now.

MAL (via com)

Okay, Kaylee - ma shong! <now!>

KAYLEE (into com)

Blackout in three... two... one.

Kaylee joins the red and white wires, the junction box sparks, and everything suddenly goes black. Flashing red emergency lighting comes on.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:54

Ott sits comfortably amidst the chaos at one of the gambling tables.

SAFFRON (via com)

He's going for the Star. Now is the time.

OTT

(into com; smiling)

Copy, Tèrese. On our way.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:56

Darkness - except for the flashing red light. A loud alarm echoes amidst the screams of panicking socialites. Mal and Saffron walk calmly through the chaos and confusion to the locked door of the display room.

MAL

They say DNA locks are unbeatable - pray tell how you plan on getting through that door? You know, steel don't keel over when kissed, right?

SAFFRON

You really have to learn to put some faith in people, sweetie.

MAL

(snickers)

Yeah – fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice...

well... shame on you... uh, again.

They arrive at the door to the Display Room. Saffron scrapes the dirt under her nails onto a piece of adhesive plastic.

FLASHBACK - INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FOUR, CASINO - 18:09

Saffron's body buckles, and she flies forward into the security officer, scratching him in the face, leaving linear bleeding cuts.

END FLASHBACK

Saffron wraps the plastic around her finger, and inserts it into the DNA analyzer on the door. A beat, then a green light, a beep, and the door opens with a hiss.

SAFFRON

(taps Mal on the nose, leaving the adhesive stuck there)
Simple. Told ya it would work, silly.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - 18:56

Mal peers inside, but doesn't set a foot onto the green lasered floor.

MR. UNIVERSE (via com)

Security cameras off... now. Grav off... now. Fly, Mally, fly!

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - 18:56

Mal floats into the display room - the floor below glows green with laser sensors.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD

MAL

Xenon gas!? Not sure I'm lovin' a plan that gets the air sucked out my lungs, Universe.

MR. UNIVERSE

Genius. I am pure genius! I can knock out the grav drive to that section of the ship! No gravity, no touching the floor. No touching the floor, no gas. Gee. Nee. Us! Give me a hug!

(beat. Mal doesn't budge)

...or not.

END FLASHBACK

Mal 'swims' through the air and makes it to the glass casing, facing the gem.

MAI

You are beautiful...

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FOUR, SECURITY CONTROL ROOM - 18:57

The security manager wakes with a start and looks around guiltily. He sees the tray of food and is confused, but the monitors catch his eye. He sees the chaos in the casino, and then looks at the monitor showing the Earth Star in the display room... The display room is sealed and empty. The Star, untouched.

SECURITY MANAGER (into com)

Get security into the pool area at once! They are about to stampede! And will someone tell me just what the HELL is going on here?! We lost pressure in the display room!

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY (via com)

Control room – what is happening to my ship!? Is the Star secure?!

SECURITY MANAGER (into com)

The door is sealed. The Earth Star is secure Captain. We believe a... pipe blew out a section of the display room

SECURITY MANAGER (into com; cont'd) and it depressurized. The room has been evacuated. We will restore power momentarily.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, DISPLAY ROOM - 18:57

Mal cuts the glass with a small tool, and puts his hand through the hole - only to be zapped by a bright white FORCE FIELD-LIKE DEVICE springing to life.

MAL

Ow! Gwai long duh dong?!<What the hell?!> (into com)

Universe! Is there a good reason for not letting me know about this gorram energy wall!?

MR. UNIVERSE (via com)

Uh, what energy wall?

An automated female VOICE ALARM suddenly goes off across the ship:

VOICE ALARM

Distress call activated. Alliance Cruiser Sakira en route. ETA five minutes, fifty seconds.

MAL (into com)

What the!? Jayne - what did you do?!

JAYNE (via com) Weren't me Mal, honest!

Simon stumbles half-conscious to the display room door. His forehead has a large gash, he has a black eye, and his shirt is covered in blood.

SIMON

Captain! You have to help me!

FLASHBACK - INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, BATHING POOL - 18:55

Chloe, Simon, and River sit in uncomfortable silence.

CHLOE

So. Hedgefield... or should I call you 'Simon'? You gonna introduce me to your sister?

Beat.

SIMON

Uh, River, meet Chl-

RIVER

They're coming to get you, you know.

SIMON

River, what do you-

CHLOE

Uh, what-

Ott and Nico move through the chaos of panicking people. Nico grabs River from behind, covering her mouth with a cloth. River's eyes flutter as she falls unconscious.

SIMON

What are you do-

OTT

Not her! The other one.

Nico releases River and uses the chloroform on Chloe. She begins binding the girl's hands and feet with tape and gagging her. Simon jumps up from the table but Ott slams him back down with a kick to the face. Simon struggles against Ott's weight.

OTI

Nico – we have a live one here. Would you mind taking over?

NICO

(smiling) With pleasure.

END FLASHBACK

Simon tosses the handheld com device into the display room. It floats toward Mal.

SIMON

Said to give you this.

MAL

(into handheld com)

Ott, yoù *liou mahng! Kào ni zuzōng shibā dài*! <Son of a bitch! F*** your ancestors to the eighteenth generation!>

OTT (via com)

Hello, Malcolm. Thank you for being my distraction.

FLASHBACK - INT. MAIDENHEAD BAR

Ott sits with Mingo and Fanty. Mingo hands Ott a CAPTURE OF CHLOE.

MINGO

The ransom will be very large for this girl.

FANTY

Father's a rich Alliance Commander. Spoils of war and such.

MINGO

So we believe he should... spread the wealth, so to speak.

OTT

It is an interesting idea, fellows, but how exactly am I going to grab the girl and get off that ship without being stopped?

Mingo looks at Fanty, Fanty looks at Mingo - and they smile.

FANTY

(through his smile)
We have just the distraction...

END FLASHBACK

MAL (into handheld com)

Ott! When I get my hands on you...

OTT (via com)

It might be a while before you do that, what with the Feds coming to take you in and all. Have a nice stay in prison, Malcolm. Farewell.

In frustration, Mal tosses the handheld com away and turns back to the Earth Star.

MAL (into com)

Universe? What about this energy wall?

MR. UNIVERSE (via com)

There's nothing here about any energy barrier device. Must be new!

MAL (into com)

Well, that's just shiny. I'm having a pretty lousy day here, so can you do somethin' about it or not?

MR. UNIVERSE (via com) Can't find any power source... Mally, looks like it's on a separate circuit. Is there a control panel at the base?

MAL (into com)

Uh... Yeah. Needs a password to unlock.

MR. UNIVERSE (via com)

How many codes do ya think you can guess in five minutes?

MAL

This is over.

(into com)

Time to go, people. Plan failed. We cut our losses 'fore the Alliance cuts 'em for us.

Mal is startled to find River floating nearby, smiling.

RIVER

Went for a swim. The water's nice.

MAL

No time for games here, little one. We gotta-

River ignores Mal, and begins pushing buttons; entering passwords on the console controlling the energy shield. The energy wall audibly shuts down. Mal looks at River in total disbelief.

FLASHBACK - INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 18:52

River is being held by two security officers. Captain Hathaway looks River in the eye.

END FLASHBACK

RIVER

People tell me things all the time! Just have to listen.

MAL

(shocked)

Maybe you ain't so useless after all.

Mal puts his hand through the hole in the glass...

MAL (cont'd)

Come to daddy...

...and grabs the large red-brown diamond. He then puts a holoprojector down and activates the fake image of a diamond. It looks identical to the Earth Star, and replaces the hole in the glass.

MAL (into com)

Okay, regroup. Back to the shuttle. Zoe, hold position for now.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, LOBBY - 19:00

Mal, River, Simon, Jayne and Saffron are marching quickly.

JAYNE

Get it?

Mal opens a SMALL BLACK BOX, which holds the Earth Star inside.

MAL

Got it.

SIMON

(looking at it)

A brown diamond?!

MAI

There any other color?

Mal takes a hard left down a passage.

JAYNE

Uh, shuttle's this way, Mal.

MAL

New plan.

(into com)

Zoe, lock down every airlock. No one in or out.

JAYNE

Are you kiddin' me!?

VOICE ALARM

Distress call activated. Alliance Cruiser Sakira en route. ETA three minutes.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK FIVE, BRIDGE - 19:00

Zoe and Kaylee look at each other - worried.

ZOE (into com)

Uh... that wise, sir?

MAL (via com)

Ain't no man's puppet... and I ain't gonna be responsible for the kidnapping of no innocent girl. Where are they Universe?

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, EMERGENCY AIRLOCK - 19:01

Ott and Nico stand in front of the AIRLOCK, stunned and annoyed. Nico had a hand on Chloe's arm, directing the groggy girl, and Ott punches the door uselessly.

OTT Aargh! *Kao!* <F***!>

Mal, Jayne, Simon, Saffron and River arrive at the airlock. Mal and Jayne raise their guns.

MAI

Problem, neighbor? Anything I can help you with?

Ott and Nico whip round, surprised by Mal. Jayne takes the opportunity to pistol whip Nico. She goes down.

OTT

You don't open this airlock, we all get caught! Don't be stupid!

MAL

Way I see it, you have a choice. Leave the girl, or get nabbed by the Feds <u>you</u> were kind enough to call. (smiles)

I believe that to be something called 'irony'.

VOICE ALARM

Distress call activated. Alliance Cruiser Sakira en route. ETA two minutes.

Beat, as Ott thinks about his options, or lack thereof. He pushes Chloe towards Mal. Simon moves forward to take charge of her.

OTT

(sigh)

You win.

MAL (into com)

Zoe - cut 'em loose.

The airlock panel goes from red to green, and the door opens with a hiss. Nico runs through it. Ott turns to run, but looks back.

OTT

This isn't the war, Malcolm. You don't make it far in this game with morals.

With that, Ott runs through the airlock onto his ship.

MAL

(quietly to himself)

Ain't sure morals got us very far there either...

Simon takes the gag off Chloe's mouth. She's crying hysterically.

Simon

You're okay. It's over. You're safe now.

RIVER

(laughing inappropriately)

He says that to me all the time.

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, LOBBY - 19:02

Six security officers are waiting in the flashing emergency lights, guns held high. Suddenly a liquid lipstick grenade ball slides by and hits one of the officers in the foot.

FLASHBACK - INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CASINO - 19:00

Mal and crew move through the chaos of the emergency lights and alarm still ringing loudly.

MR. UNIVERSE (via com) Mally, we got ourselves a small hiccup.

FLASHBACK - INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S PAD - 19:00

Mr. Universe is staring at a monitor - six security officers waiting for our crew in the lobby.

END FLASHBACK

A beat, and the officers all drop to the floor like marionettes with their strings cut. Two more security officers come running, shooting at the crew.

ZOE

Take cover!

Everyone dives behind pillars. Jayne pulls Saffron clear as a laser beam burns a hole in the wall behind where she was standing. Jayne and Mal fire back at the security officers from behind the pillars, but our crew is pinned down.

VOICE ALARM

Distress call activated. Alliance Cruiser Sakira en route. ETA one minute.

MAL (into com)
Universe! Cut the grav drive to the lobby!

The gravity goes off in the lobby, and the officers are taken by surprise as they float and Mal rushes them by launching off a pillar and kicking them simultaneously square in the jaw – one foot for each face.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S PAD - 19:02

Mr. Universe is sitting very close to one of the monitors showing the action. The two security officers go down, and Mal kicks their guns away in mid-air.

MR. UNIVERSE Ooh! Yeah! Ouch! That was a good one!

INT. NU DU SHEN - DECK THREE, CORRIDOR - 19:03

The crew, now with Zoe and Kaylee in tow, are in full stride toward the shuttles. They round a bend, and stop short. Twenty Alliance Security Officers, guns ready, stand at the airlock to their shuttles.

VOICE ALARM Alliance Cruiser Sakira, docked – deck three. MAL

(mumbles to himself) Thanks for the warning.

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

Up against the wall! Drop all weapons!

The crew are pushed face first against the wall, with their hands up. Soldiers begin to handcuff them.

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY (cont'd)
Did you honestly think you *he mo*
brown demons> would get away with kidnapping my daughter!

Chloe suddenly bursts through the soldiers. She sees Simon on his knees, handcuffed.

CHLOE

Daddy wait! These are the guys who saved me!

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

What?

CHLOE

These are my heroes! (smiles at Simon)

...saved me from the kidnappers.

Beat, as Hathaway studies his daughter. Then...

CAPTAIN HATHAWAY

Untile them at once! I am terribly sorry, Mister...?

SIMON

It's doctor.

(smiles and winks at Chloe)

Doctor Brighton.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal is flying. Zoe comes up onto the bridge.

Where is your gorram husband?

(worried)

Don't know. Can't find him anywhere, sir.

Mal pulls down the ship's loudspeaker com system.

MAL (into loudspeaker)

Wash? Where in Hades're you hidin'? I don't pay you to sit in your bunk! Get your pi qu here and fly my boat!

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - SAME TIME

Saffron leans into Jayne, who is leaning against the wall at the bottom of the stairs.

SAFFRON

You saved my life. I don't know how to thank you.

JAYNE

I... I...

SAFFRON You were so brave... and all... macho. Ooh, it just makes me so...

She kisses Jayne on the cheek.

SAFFRON (cont'd)

Thank you.

Saffron pulls away, and walks off, leaving Jayne breathless.

JAYNE

I... I...



INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

The screen comes to life - 'INCOMING WAVE'. Mal taps a button, and Ott appears on the screen.

OTT (via Wave)

Captain Malcolm - that was a close call. Glad to see you got away.

MAI

Wish I could say the same for you... 'bout the being glad.

OTT (via Wave)

No need to be so dramatic Mal. I believe we have some business to discuss, yes?

MAL

No. And I see you again, you will be on the short end of a bullet, that is my solemn promise.

OTT (via Wave)

Hasty promise, Captain.

Wash suddenly appears on screen, with a gun held on him, courtesy of Nico. Zoe jumps forward in rage.

WASH (via Wave)

(waves)

Hi Mal. Hi honey... So... how's things?

FLASHBACK - INT. NU DU SHEN CASINO

MAL

(to Nico)

Nico. You look pretty... almost pass for a woman there.

Nico sneers. Ott whispers into Nico's ear:

ОП

(whispering)

...get us some collateral, for... insurance purposes. Don't want to get the jump pulled on us by this roach.

Nico smiles, and walks off.

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY AFT PASSAGE - MINUTES LATER

Nico sneaks forward towards the bridge, where Wash and River are. In the distance we can hear:

RIVER (OS)

You're boring.

WASH (OS)

No I'm not! I'm the most spontaneous, unboring man you ever will...

Nico moves silently and slowly forward, through the dining room, into the:

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY FORE PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

WASH (OS)

How'd you-!?

Nico sees River get up and head out the bridge, so she swiftly ducks down one of the ladders into:

FLASHBACK - INT. JAYNE'S BUNK - CONTINUOUS

RIVER (OS, muffled)

Boring!

River's footsteps overhead. Nico looks around - sees some guns poking out from behind a curtain on the wall. She pulls the curtain down.

NICO (softly)

Wow.

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY FORE PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

Nico climbs up the ladder and looks back slowly. River is moving down the aft passage, but stops and suddenly turns around. Nico drops quickly down the ladder again into Jayne's bunk. River apparently doesn't notice her, and moves toward the shuttle. Nico waits.

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY BRIDGE - LATER

Nico stands silently behind Wash, gun ready.

END FLASHBACK

OTT (via Wave)

You deprived me of my ransom, so I feel I am being more than generous when I offer your pilot here in exchange for the Star.

(without a second thought) Where?

OTT (via Wave)

Stay put. We will come to you.

Act Four

EXT. SERENITY - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Serenity sits silently in the black. Ott's ship cruises slowly adjacent to the cargo bay's airlock, and docks. His ship is almost twice the length of Serenity, but narrower - a new model Blue Sun Hawk Class - all sleek and shiny black.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - MOMENTS LATER

The cargo bay doors hiss open. Mal stands in the middle of the cargo bay, gun drawn. Zoe and Jayne are up on the stairs on either side of the bay, guns drawn. Kaylee and Simon stand at the back entrance to the common area. Ott, Nico, Clarence and Gowe stand in a row in the doorway - guns drawn. Ott's gun is aimed at the bound Wash. This is an old fashioned Mexican stand-off. Behind Ott and his crew, we glimpse the inside of his ship - new black leather furnishings. Not a loose wire to be seen.

JAYNE

Kinda makes Serenity look a bit of turd, huh, Mal?

MAL

Shut up, Jayne.

OTT

No sudden moves or your pilot's last navigation will be around this cargo bay... in pieces.

MAL

Easy. You'll get what you want.

NICO

(to Jayne)

Hey - ugly! What's that on your face?

Jayne wipes his face - smudges the lipstick, then smells, and licks his fingers. A beat. He collapses, unconscious.

MAL

(rolling his eyes)

Great. Four to two.

Ott shoves Wash to the floor, and puts a boot hard on his back, keeping his pistol trained on Wash's head. Zoe pushes forward a few steps, anxious and angry.

ZOE

You touch a hair on his head-

OTT

Enough threats, enough games. Just give me the Star, and you won't hear from me again.

ΜΔΙ

I think we'll have to ask Kaylee first. Whadda ya say, Kaylee?

KAYLEE

Don't much like the idea of you kidnapping no little girl.

WASH

Little girl? Who're you calling-

MAL

Not you! Stay out of this.

WASH

(looking up at Ott)

I'd really like to.

OTT

(cocking his gun)

That is a pity then.

Kaylee flips a switch behind her - the cargo bay goes dark, and sparks fly everywhere. Screams. A gunshot. Silence.

MAL (OS)

(shouting)

Kaylee! You can turn it off now!

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY CARGO BAY

Mal, Kaylee, Zoe, Jayne, and Simon are in the cargo bay.

MAL

Kaylee, think you could hook up that Z-4 coupling directly to the cargo bay floor?

KAYLEE

But... Captain that would-

MAL

Ain't got but a few minutes 'til they're here. Yes or no?

KAYLEE

Yes.

(beat)

But you know electric voltage ain't fussy as to who it runs into, right Cap'n? You standing on that cargo bay when it happens, you get you lickins, too.

MAI

Bother on the details later. Just hook it up...

He looks around, looks up.

MAL (cont'd)

What about that up there?

END FLASHBACK

The sparks stop, the light flickers back on. Wash, Ott and his entire crew are on the floor, electrocuted unconscious. Mal is precariously swinging from a chain that was hanging overhead. Zoe and Simon come running over to Wash.

MAL

(looking down)

Details, details...

INT. SERENITY - MEDICAL BAY - LATER

Jayne and Wash are lying in the two beds. Wash is out, Jayne's coming to.

JAYNE

Wha- Wha's goin' on. We win?

MAL

Yup. S'over... no thanks to you.

(smiling, to Saffron)

So... yoù kissed him did ya?

SAFFRON

(smiles)

Didn't mean it. Forgot that lipstick was even on! It was fun though, wasn't it, Jayney-bear?

JAYNE

Yeah. I quess so.

(to Mal)

Well, not so much... She just... Hey, least I didn't wind up naked in a-

MAL

Don't.

ZOE

(indicating Wash)

How's he doin', Doc?

SIMON

He'll be all right. Just sleeping off the shock... literally.

Zoe grabs Wash's hand tight.

ZOE

Don't know what I'd do I ever lost you...

(beat, looks up)

He's gonna pay.

Zoe moves quickly out the medical bay.

JAYNE

Mal, don't you wanna make darn sure this dah shiong duh bao tai <elephant's afterbirth> doesn't come all in our way again? We could finish this right here and now!

MAL

Got a feeling I won't have to.

Mal follows Zoe out into:

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

Zoe is standing over Ott, holding a pistol.

ZOE

(calmly)

Now, *ni`shi wo´de biao zu* <you are my bitch>. You ever come near me or my husband again and you will die so quickly, Hell won't have time to catch your corpse. *Dong luh ma* <Are we perfectly clear here>?

OTT

(coughing)

Yes... I swear.

She kicks Ott, and he rolls back onto his own ship. Mal closes the cargo bay doors.

INT. SERENITY - ENGINE ROOM - LATER

Simon sits on the hammock, trying to engage Kaylee in conversation, but she's avoiding him, puttering with the engine.

SIMON

What? What is it? Tell me...

KAYLEE

S'nothin'... s'just... you fit so well in that world Simon. You talk the talk an' walk the walk. You were so happy-

SIMON

I was merely playing a role.

KAYLEE

Easy to play though - right?

No answer – only a very uncomfortable silence.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Jus' feels like as much you live here on Serenity, s'just never gonna be right for u-... for you...

INT. SERENITY - WASH & ZOE'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Wash and Zoe are spooning on their bed. Wash is the little spoon.

KAYLEE (OS, cont'd)

...'s'never gonna be your home...

ZOE

Feeling better honey?

WASH

Yeah... all in a day's thievery, right?

ZOE

I don't know...

WASH

What?

ZOE

Every day, life seems to get more dangerous around here.

WASH

Well, that <u>is</u> the nature of what we do as thieving brigands, honey.

70F

...What if it wasn't?

INT. SERENITY - MAL'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Mal is lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling.

ZOE (OS, cont'd)

I meant... what if we weren't?

INT. MAIDENHEAD BAR - LATER

Mal and Zoe walk into the Maidenhead's upper level.

BOUNCER

Weapons in the guncheck please.

Mal, without a second's hesitation or warning whacks the man unconscious with the butt of his gun. He is raging. He is determined. Mal and Zoe move down the stairs, and without hesitation hold their weapons trained on Mingo and Fanty.

MINGO

Whoa. Whoa. What's all this then?

MAL

Don't much appreciate being Alliance fish-bait.

FANTY

Calm yourself, Captain. You did yourself right. Passed our little test. Now's the time for dealin', not for fightin'.

MAL

In my industry those are the same things.

FANTY

Yes, well...

ZOE

Fifty... no, sixty percent.

MINGO

What?!

FANTY What!?

What!

Zoe cocks her sawed-off shotgun.

ZOE

Sixty-five.

FANTY

Could be you're misunderstanding how we do business, love.

MINGO

There's some folks that do business with guns in their faces. We ain't them.

FANTY

We wanted you dead, you'd be dead by now.

MINGO

Seein' as how you queered Ott's job for us-

MAI

Which almost got me an' mine took by the Feds!

FANTY

-We'll split the take on that shiny little gem right down the middle with you.

Mal looks at Zoe, who stows her anger. The bouncer arrives, looking sore, and collects their guns.

MINGO

Well, then. Now that that's settled, why don't we have a sit-down and you can show me and Mingo this unstealable diamond you've stolen for us?

Mal comes to the table, leaning in close and breathing deep. Zoe remains standing.

MAL

Don't kid a kidder, Mingo.

MINGO

Fanty, how does he do that?

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - 72 HOURS AGO

WASH is in his chair all relaxed, with his feet up. Mal, Jayne and Zoe standing behind him.

ZOE

Don't like them, sir. They're itchy. Don't care what Parker, said, I heard tale of some nasty things they done a few years back.

JAYNE

They ain't so bad. I worked for a crew did a job for 'em once. They was fair as fair is.

WASH

'Mingo'? 'Fanty'? Great puppet names!

MAL

(turns to Jayne, surprised)
You... know them?! And you're only telling me this now

JAYNE

(shrugs)

Never came up.

Mal and Zoe exchange looks.

MAL

Tell me. Tell me everything you know.

JAYNE

Call 'emselves 'respectable businessmen and the like, but don't let their core-fashioned suits fool ya - they're every bit the devil and won't think twice 'fore' putting one through your heart, you cross 'em.

MAL

That it?

JAYNE

Told ya I did a job for 'em once Mal, not like I was... datin' their sisters.

(beat)

Oh, and Mingo has the nastiest dog breath you ever come 'cross. Gum disease or somethin', but gorram it's foul...

END FLASHBACK

Good, we're settled then. Ladies, may I present, the Earth Star.

Mal opens the black box. Its empty.

MAL (cont'd)

Huh.

FLASHBACK - INT. SERENITY CARGO BAY

Saffron leans into Jayne, who is leaning against the wall at the bottom of the stairs.

SAFFRON

You saved my life. I don't know how to thank you.

Saffron's hands are busy behind Jayne – opening the CONCEALED COMPARTMENT on the wall right next to him.

JAYNE

I... I...

Saffron gets so close to Jayne that she is whispering in his ear, her body pressed against his.

SAFFRON

You were so brave... and all... macho. Ooh, it just makes me so...

She kisses Jayne on the cheek, and behind him, switches out the box containing the Earth Star with an identical empty box.

SAFFRON (cont'd)

Thank you.

END FLASHBACK

ZOE

That no good puo foo! <detestable shrew!>

FANTY

Not exactly passed with flying colors... but you are a surprising one you are, Captain Reynolds.

(beat)

Didn't expect you to come back with the stone anyways.

MINGO

Unstealable, after all.

MAL

What about Saffron?

FANTY

Who?

(beat)

Oh! Terèse?! Well-

MINGO

Didn't know if we could trust her, anyway, so this is almost a favor you've done us.

FANTY

She's on our naughty list now.

EXT. STREETS OF BEAUMONDE - NIGHT

Saffron walks away down the streets of Beaumonde.

MINGO (VO)

Don't you worry. Vixen such as her tends to turn up again.

MAL (VO)

Don't I know it.

Saffron opens the box, sees the beautiful red glow, and smiles.

MAL (VO) (quietly, to himself) Fool me three times...

EXT. MAIDEN HEAD BAR - NIGHT

Mal and Zoe walk out of the Maidenhead.

FANTY (VO)
Then our business appears to be concluded, Captain...
We'll be in contact with another job soon.

Well, Zoe, seems like things are finally about to go our way.

INT. NU DU SHEN - SECURITY CONTROL ROOM

Captain Hathaway and a MAN stand together, watching footage of River gambling in the casino.

MAN

Tell me everything, Captain Hathaway. Everything.

It is the MYSTERIOUS MAN who pursued the crew to Boros last episode.

BLACKOUT.

FYI

The Earth Star is a real diamond. It was cut from a rough gem weighing 248.9 carats found in the Jagersfontein Mine on May 16th, 1967. It travelled right through the recovery process until it appeared on the grease table in the recovery plant. Not surprisingly its appearance caused a commotion at the mine and to many in the diamond industry because too amoung the numerous fine diamonds found at Jagersfontein, there had been few brown gems. In all its long existence, the mine had never been known for producing large stones of this color. Moreover this specimen came from the 2500-foot level of the mine workings, which is exceptionally deep in a volcanic diamond-bearing pipe for a gem of this size to be found in.

Baumgold Bros. of New York purchased the stone and cut it into a pear shape weighing 111.59 carats, then the largest faceted brown diamond in the world. The diamond was found to have a greater degree of brilliance than is usually seen in a gem of such a strong color: the combination of color and brilliance led to Joseph Baumgold naming it the Earth Star. The diamond returned to South Africa in 1971 for display at the exhibition held to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the discovery of the Kimberly Mine. The diamond would later be bought in 1983 for \$900,000 by Stephen Zbova of Naples, Florida.

Sources: Famous Diamonds by Ian Balfour and Diamonds - Famous, Notable and Unique by GIA.

For associated images relating to this episode see www.stillflying.net. Including:

- The Earth Star diamond in all its glory
- A floor plan for the Nu Du Shen, culled from the Serenity RPG and modified.